

The Death of a great Man improved.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

B R I S T O L,

IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE DECEASE

O F T H E

Rev. RICHARD PRICE, D. D. F.R.S. &c. &c.

Who departed this Life, APRIL 19, 1791,

In the 68th Year of his Age.

By THOMAS WRIGHT.

B R I S T O L:

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TO THE
GENTLEMEN
WHO
REQUESTED THE PUBLICATION
OF THIS
SERMON,

IT IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE FRIEND

AND OBLIGED SERVANT

THO. WRIGHT.



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S E R M O N.

II. SAMUEL, Chap. III. Verse 38.

And the King said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?

HA T H then some valiant officer, renowned for his victories, or statesman celebrated for his wisdom in conducting public affairs, lately fallen in this kingdom? If there had, I should leave others to record his fame — These are not the only persons, who deserve the character in the text. Men of eminent intellectual and moral qualities, of extensive knowledge,

knowledge, beneficent hearts, and zeal for truth and righteousness. — Men who exert their powers, for the temporal and eternal benefit of individuals, and the welfare of society. These may with equal, with superior reason be stiled *great*. Such a one, in a very eminent sense, hath lately fallen — not, like Abner, by the hand of a treacherous assassin, but by the common, instrument of death, and been deposited in the grave, with deserved funeral solemnity, when multitudes evidenced their deep concern by their attendance — an oration was pronounced over him, not indeed, as over Abner, by a king, but by one whose distinguished abilities, and acquaintance with the deceased, enabled him to perform it in a judicious and affectionate manner; * and all the people, no doubt, wept, or with sorrow in their hearts, too deep for tears, returned to their habitations, ruminating on the loss, which his friends, his country, the Christian church, every thing that can justly be included in the Israel of God, hath sustained! You will

* The Rev. Dr. Kippis.

will naturally suppose me to refer to the Rev. Dr. Price ; a Gentleman well known in the world, with whose excellent writings, many of you have been delighted—by whose instructions and devotional exercises in the pulpit, this church was formerly, several times greatly edified—with whom some of its members, and especially its ministers were particularly acquainted, and, one of them enjoyed a considerable share of his friendship from early life !

But neither his reputation in the world, his occasional services in this church, the intercourses of friendship which have passed between us, nor my earnest desire to shew respect to his memory, should have induced me to present to this assembly, a few thoughts, which the account of his death hath suggested, did I not hope they will prove of use to us all, by bringing important truths to our minds, impressing the sense of them on our hearts, and exciting us to the performance of our duties as men and Christians !

What

What I purpose, is in the first place, to mention a few things concerning the spirit and conduct of Dr. Price, from my own knowledge or credible information ; which will shew that the character in the text, in the noblest sense, belongs to him. And then 2dly. some remarks and observations of a practical nature, for which the subject lays a solid foundation.

Dr. Richard Price was the son of a dissenting minister at Bridgend in Glamorganshire, of good repute in his profession, and affluent circumstances, under whose instructions he early manifested an inquisitive disposition. In the course of his accademical education, he shewed an ardent thirst after knowledge, and that of the most important nature — of the causes and principles of things in the natural, civil, and religious world. On these he exercised his thoughts, and acquainted himself thoroughly with such arts, and sciences, as are previously necessary, or useful means of attaining it ; as logic, geometry, and other branches of the mathematics,

matics, for an acquaintance with which, he was greatly esteemed at that time ; and which he continued to study, and made great use of through the course of his life ; not only in natural philosophy, or explaining the laws, by which the Creator governs the material world, but likewise in calculations relating to Reversionary Payments, and other branches of political Arithmetic. From which the nation hath, or might have received considerable advantage : As it is certain that in consequence of them, some schemes, very threatening to the comfort and support of widows and orphans, have been laid aside, and others, conducive to their welfare, established. And above all, his knowledge in this science, hath been employed with success in detecting the fallacious reasoning of a celebrated infidel writer, against miracles.

This last use of human learning, it will be acknowledged by all Christians, was commendable ; but some may possibly say, ‘ Can it ever be proper for a Christian minister, to engage so much as Dr. *Price* hath

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done, in the civil and temporal affairs of the world ? Would it not have been more becoming his character, to have confined himself, to those things that relate immediately to the souls of men, and their eternal salvation !—To obviate which, I would ask ; doth a person by becoming a Christian, cease to be a man ? Is not a minister a member of civil as well as of religious society, and obliged, as such, to promote the temporal, as well as spiritual welfare of mankind ? While he describes the oppression of the souls of men by sin, and the means by which they may be preserved or delivered from it, is he to take no notice of the slavery and oppression, to which their bodies and external circumstances are exposed, with the means of safety ? Have not Christians civil privileges, which it is their duty to preserve ; and which ministers are to instruct them in, and exhort them to maintain ? This, one would imagine, no reflecting person could call in question. Besides, this is necessary to their preserving their religious privileges, which are always infringed, if not entirely destroyed, when

when civil liberty is lost! The powers of the world, in this case, generally usurp the place of God and conscience. They direct what worship they please, and prohibit all other. Superstition commonly takes place of pure religion, and is made use of to rivet their fetters on mankind!

Were therefore, the civil rights of men, of no value in themselves; and in that view, out of the province of the ministers of religion; yet from their connexion with spiritual and eternal things, they will justify a share of their regard: nay, where peculiar talents are given them by Providence, and opportunities afforded, it is their duty to exert themselves, for the welfare of civil society. With such talents, our deceased friend was intrusted in an eminent degree: Such opportunities offered; circumstances of a very unusual nature occurred, and called upon him to exercise them: He obeyed!

When the rulers of the nation engaged in a very expensive and bloody war, with

our fellow-subjects beyond the Atlantic; he wrote "Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, and the Principles of Government," in which he considered that war in respect of Justice—the Principles of the Constitution—Policy and humanity—the honor of the kingdom—and the probability of succeeding in it: In each of which he shewed it to be extremely defective. This treatise damped, in some measure, the spirits of the abettors of that unnatural contest, excited the displeasure of the consistent friends of liberty, and the prosperity of the nation against it; particularly of the Corporation of London, who manifested their approbation of the work and its author, by conferring upon him the freedom of the city, in the most honorable manner.

The issue and effects of that war are well known. When it terminated in the acknowledged independency of the American States; and a constitution of Government was to be formed; they applied to the Doctor for his assistance in that momentous affair.

affair. His age, his connexions in this country, and his relation to a very respectable church, in which he discharged the duties of the pastoral office, with diligence and affection, prevented him from complying with their request, as it included his personal presence ; but he communicated to them his advice in a treatise, intitled, ‘ Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of making it a Benefit to the World.’ Of this, there is no doubt, they availed themselves, and that it contributed considerably towards the constitution, which they now enjoy, and which, in some respects, exceeds all others. In most of the states, religion stands entirely on the foundation of its truth, and the power of God. That unnatural alliance between church and state, which takes place in these parts of the world,—that power in magistrates of appointing a form of religion, for the community—that invasion of the rights of citizens, by excluding some Christians from places of trust, on account of their religious profession, which prevails in this na-

tion, being quite unknown. An effect of the revolution, which a person of eminence in the religious world, hath not scrupled to represent, as a compensation for all the blood and treasure lavished in that long and dreadful contest. Glorious indeed is that liberty to the states, in which it takes place. Happy to the inhabitants of other countries, to whom it will afford a safe retreat, if they should be oppressed by spiritual wickedness in high places, even the rulers of this dark world !

The treatise last-mentioned was translated into French, by the celebrated Mirabeau, (whose death is now lamented by the friends of freedom in that nation) and may reasonably be supposed, to have contributed, towards enlightening the minds of the inhabitants of that country—inspiring them with a love of liberty—and preparing them to effect the Revolution, which hath taken place. A revolution, glorious in its nature, and important in its effects ! A system of despotism, which had subsisted for ages, overthrown.—Tyrants deprived of their power,

power, and instruments of oppression—prisoners released from their unjust confinement—heavy burdens taken off from the depressed people—the sword of persecution sheathed, and all the citizens, different as may be, their religious professions, declared eligible to offices of honor and profit in the state—the vail of superstition in some measure rent; so that the light of true religion glimmers through, and giveth one room to hope, it will, ere long shine forth in all its native lustre!

An event so interesting to the civil and religious rights of mankind, so unparallel in the annals of the world; which could not but cheer the hearts of all, who have a rational concern for truth and liberty, for pure religion and the happiness of their fellow-creatures, might well be supposed, powerfully to affect the breast of Dr. *Price*. One may introduce his description of his feelings on the occasion by the following eloquent passage, from a celebrated treatise of a right honourable gentleman, who remarking on a sermon of the
 Doctor's,

Doctor's, preached at the *Old Jewry*, Nov. 4, 1789, before the Revolution Society, faith, "This inspires a juvenile warmth through his whole frame, and when he arrives at his peroration, it is in full blaze. Then viewing from the Pisgah of his pulpit, the free, moral, happy and glorious state of France, as in a bird-eye landskip of a promised land, he breaks out into the following rapture." "What an eventful period is this: I am thankful that I have lived to see it. I could almost say, Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. I have lived to see a diffusion of knowledge, which hath undermined superstition and error; I have lived to see the rights of men better understood than ever, and nations panting for liberty, which seemed to have lost the idea of it: I have lived to see thirty millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects."

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Such were the sentiments, such the delightful sensations of his heart; when he meditated on that event, and the description which that gentleman hath given of them, with a sneer of disapprobation, will be deemed a real panegyrick, by every enlightened friend of the civil and religious rights of mankind. Yes the severity with which Mr. Burke pursueth him, in his *Reflections* on the French Revolution, will raise their ideas of his merit, since it evidently, proveth, that he considereth Dr. Price as a formidable enemy to the sacredness of *ancient usage, prejudice, and non-resistance*, which (connected as they generally are with oppression and superstition) he exerts his fine imagination, and great abilities to defend. And it is not easy to determine, whether the title of *the Apostle of liberty*, given him by one, who then ranked high among the nobility of France †, and now doth in its national assembly, or the language of reproach which the said right honourable gentleman hath thrown out against him, conduceth most to exalt his character,

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racter,

† The Duke of Rochefoucault.

rafter, as an able advocate for religious and civil liberty.

But great as were the talents of Dr. *Price*, and noble his exertions in this cause, they were by no means confined to subjects of that description; I should rather say, they were principally engaged by such as are particularly connected with the character of a Christian minister. These, his excellent writings clearly shew, employed much of his time. In an early period of his life, he published a "Review of the principal questions and difficulties in Morals—with a Dissertation on the Being and Attributes of God," which bear evident marks of a penetrating understanding, and pious heart.

This treatise was followed by another, containing four Dissertations on important subjects, viz. the first on *Divine Providence*, which he sheweth to be *particular*, or that all the occurrences in nature are under perfectly wise and good direction. This layeth a proper foundation for the second,
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on *the nature, reasonableness, and efficacy of Prayer*; which he treats with such strength of judgment, and warmth of devout affection, as powerfully tend to convince the understanding, and impress the heart with a sense of its importance and necessity. — The third is on the reasons we have to believe that virtuous men will meet and know each other in a state of happiness beyond the grave — a doctrine which he improves to the practice of virtue and the comfort of Christians on the death of their pious friends. — The last is on the importance of Christianity, the Nature of historical evidence and Miracles.

Were I to enumerate all the considerable productions of his pen, closely connected with his profession, I might mention the Letters, which passed between him and a friend of high rank in the world of science,* on the subjects of *Materialism* and *Necessity*; which he opposed; maintaining the spirituality of the human mind, and the freedom of human actions; on which the merit

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* Dr. Priestly.

or demerit of our conduct, and the propriety of rewards and punishments, entirely depend. A correspondence distinguished by acuteness of understanding and especially by the liberal and candid spirit of its authors.

But I must not omit his last work, consisting of various Sermons, particularly on the "Christian Doctrine as received by the different denominations of Christians." In this he describes the principal schemes with impartiality, and treats their patrons with candor. And having rejected that which represents our Saviour as the supreme being, and yet as making an adequate compensation to our heavenly Father, for all the blessings of the gospel; which he designs to confer on a select number only; as inconsistent with the *unity*, and derogatory to the *righteousness* and *mercy* of God — and likewise that which in the other extreme, considereth Christ as having had no existence, before he came into this world, and sustaining little more than the office of a prophet, as degrading his *character*

rafter and the *grace* displayed in his mediation. — He adopteth that which, agreeably to the language of scripture, represents our Lord as divesting himself of celestial glory, and taking flesh in an uncommon manner, that he might, by his obedience and sufferings, become the author of redemption from death to all mankind, and of eternal salvation to all that obey him. This scheme represents Christianity in a most important, grand and interesting point of view; and while it tendeth to awake the warmest gratitude to God, and his well beloved Son, in our hearts, affordeth the strongest motives to holiness.

These are his principal publications, which have communicated to all who have read them with impartiality, sentiments of the excellence of his understanding, and the piety and benevolence of his heart. Sentiments which a personal intercourse with him would have confirmed, and heightened. This would have thoroughly convinced them, that the honour of God, and the happiness of mankind, by the diffusion

fusion of useful knowledge and the practice of virtue, were the great objects of his studies and labours, and not any selfish ends. Ambition and Avarice were entire strangers to his heart. He was perfectly satisfied with his condition; and his fortune, though moderate, was sufficient to defray the expences of that plain stile of life which he adopted, and to enable him to perform numerous acts of beneficence, in which he delighted; to which purpose he appropriated a considerable share of his income. — Surrounded as he was, in the latter part of life, by the blaze of popular fame, celebrated by the learned, and honoured by the friendship of some of the great men of this world, he preserved his humility, his mildness, his familiar intercourse, as far as his numerous avocations would permit, with persons of much inferior qualities, with whom he had been acquainted, and his courtesy towards all. It would be almost a reflection, to say, he preserved his gratitude to, and dependance upon God. These though vigorous in youth, were strengthened by the success
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and reputation he met with in his pursuits. No one better knew, or was more deeply sensible, that all talents come from God, and should be employed in his service: nor did any man of eminent merit ever arrogate less to himself, or manifest a greater insensibility of his excellent attainments. This most noble and useful principle of piety, had taken thorough possession of his soul, and exerted itself in the most natural and unaffected manner, in his private conversation, as well as his public performances, which seldom failed, without the assistance of a strong voice and the arts of oratory, to awake serious thoughts in the minds, and devout affections in the hearts of his hearers. This principle actuated him in health; it supported him in sickness and the prospect of death, "enabling him (to use the words of a near relation of his which I have read) to bear eight weeks excruciating pain, not only without murmuring, but with serenity; and to exercise that divine spirit in sickness and death, which had rendered him an ornament to human nature, through life!"

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He may therefore be said to have been truly great—his moral and religious were equal to his intellectual attainments. Many perhaps may have exceeded him in particular branches of human learning. Some possibly in most. But few if any have surpassed or equalled him in all the sciences, human and divine; and especially in that piety and benevolence, which excited him to employ them, in promoting the happiness of mankind.

But he is fallen and removed from our sight! What wholly fallen,—entirely perished! Shall those excellent powers of heart and mind, which God hath given; and which he cultivated with so much diligence, be deprived of their knowledge, their activity, their enjoyment! Shall that soul which was capable of tracing the wisdom and goodness of God in his works; and of adoring, loving and enjoying him, fall into a state of insensibility—that heart which glowed with benevolence and brotherly love, which was capable of giving and receiving pleasure, by the intercourses
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of friendship with the inhabitants of heaven, be stripped of all its amiable qualities, become cold and senseless as the clods of the valley ! The spirit within us revolts at such a notion. Sentiments of the wisdom and goodness of God, as well as several passages of scripture, encourage us to hope, that such a soul will be immediately admitted into their glorious society.—But, whatever doubts there may be concerning the time of its commencing, blessed be God, we have by the gospel, the fullest assurance of a future state of happiness for the righteous ; in which all shall receive a reward, honorable and glorious according to their diligence in the work assigned them, and their improvements in knowledge, righteousness and holiness after the image of God. What honor, what felicity then, must not such faithful and improved servants of God, as our deceased friend, be supposed to enjoy ! * And therefore, though we must feel

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* While the author was composing this discourse, he heard of the death of the Rev. PETER GAUTIER. A gentleman of good learning, great liberality of mind, and a very exemplary conduct ; who having

a deep concern, for the loss which his particular friends, the church, and the world have sustained by his removal, yet a persuasion of his advantage, especially when arrived, as he was, near a period of life, in which there is generally, but little pleasure, and capacity of active service; should moderate our sorrow, and instantly suppress any doubts that may arise of the wisdom and goodness of divine Providence.

I would observe 2dly, The reason we have to bless God, who raised him up;
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spent the former part of his life, in preaching the gospel in France; where he was exposed to great difficulties and dangers, which greatly impaired his health; passed the latter part of it, as minister of the French church, and an instructor of youth, in this city. The Revolution in France, which hath given such a fatal blow to bigotry and persecution, filled him with the highest pleasure! more especially as it restored to their rights as citizens, and the full enjoyment of their religious liberty, as Christians, his friends and brothers, the French Protestants, and freed them from those unjust sufferings to which during his residence among them, they were always exposed.

continued him so long, and enabled him to to do so much service in the church and the world.—“ Every good and perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights,” declares St. James agreeably to the principles of sound philosophy. He is the author of the whole frame of man, and in a peculiar sense *the father of spirits*—hath distinguished some from others—given them the means of growing in all those qualities, which fit them for eminent service, and succeeded their studies and labors to that end. One of the wisest Philosophers, as well as the most eminent orators, in the Gentile world asserts, “ that there never was a great man without the divine influence ;” meaning, as it should seem, particular assistance from God. Whether he hath reason or not to affirm this of great generals and ambitious statesmen—we certainly have just ground to assert it of men eminent for virtue, and excellent talents exerted in defence of truth and liberty, the promotion of knowledge and righteousness, on which the happiness of mankind, both here and hereafter, depends.

How thankful then should we be to divine Providence, for raising up so able and warm an advocate for these important objects, and continuing him so long, to bear public testimony to the truth by his writings, and countenance it by his steady adherence to the doctrine and worship taught by the gospel!—The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord! The residue of the Spirit is with him: May he raise up, and send forth other able and faithful servants, to defend the cause of pure religion, and crown their labors with abundant success!

3dly, We are naturally led to reflect on the superior excellency of the Christian religion, as taught in the New Testament, to all the systems and schemes of philosophy! Compare the accounts, which the most eminent philosophers in the Pagan world, have given of God and religion—of the duties of men here, and their expectations hereafter, with those, which our deceased friend, and other Christian philosophers of the present age have laid before us; and you will find
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them as the productions of children, to those of men.—Obscure, doubtful, erroneous on those momentous subjects; whereas those of the others are just, certain and clear :—It is owing likewise to their adhering closely to the instructions of scripture, that they have presented us with a system of religious faith, worship, and practice, so much more simple and excellent, than that of any Christian divines, who have paid a regard to the authority of particular persons, or churches, whether ancient or modern.

As the gospel hath given them nobler sentiments of religion, so hath it raised them to a far more excellent spirit, than the Heathen philosophers possessed. It hath inspired them with such a sacred regard to truth, as engaged them steadily to profess it, in opposition to the prevailing opinions and customs of the world, and, in many cases, at the hazard of every thing valuable: while the most eminent sages in the Heathen world, like many infidels in the present age, conformed to the established superstition

perstition and idolatry.—And not only in the profession of the truth, but in the purity of their lives, and the amiableness of their temper, doth its superior excellence appear; particularly in the forgiveness of injuries; and in meekness and humility, of which many, and especially Dr. Price, have set striking examples. *That* in the most effectual manner they have been taught of God, *who is reconciling the world to himself, by his beloved Son, not imputing their transgressions unto them.*†—*These* they have learned by going to Christ *who was meek and lowly in heart*; and displayed those difficult virtues in his conduct, as well as recommended them by his doctrine, in such a manner as no other person ever did: for *being in the form of God, he was not desirous of continuing like unto God, but divested himself of it, and took upon him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*‡. To that divine teacher have they gone, and to him we must go, hearkening to his voice, and

† Phil. ii. 6, &c.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 19.

and contemplating his conduct both in life and death, if we would possess that meekness, humility and mercy, which are the greatest ornaments of human nature, and in the sight of God of great price.

The religion which hath produced, and is still able to produce such excellent fruits, is worthy of our most cordial acceptance—demands the warmest gratitude to God who prepared it for us, and the most affectionate remembrance of his beloved Son, who published it to the world, and confirmed it by his death !

Lastly, What hath been said of the *fall of a great man*, shews the necessity of diligence in the immediate and persevering improvement of our talents, and the application of them to the great ends for which they are given.

The excellency of the thing itself — the example set before us — the need there is in the world of the exertion of our powers, and various other motives conspire, to animate

mate us in the pursuit of wisdom and the practice of righteousness.— We have not the talents, which the great man, lately fallen, possessed; but we have all some talents, for the use and improvement of which we must give an account. We are not required to defend civil and religious liberty by writing, but we are to support it by our conduct; standing fast in the liberty with which divine Providence has made us free: and especially adhering closely to the worship of the *Father in Spirit and Truth, in the name of Christ*, agreeably to his command,* to whatever temporal inconveniences or sufferings it may expose us.

We may not be called, nor have it in our power, publicly to explain and prove by words, the excellence of a Christian temper and conduct; but we are able and obliged to cultivate a Christian spirit, and maintain a conversation becoming the gospel; and this will operate powerfully in the spheres

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*. John iv. 23, and xvi. 23.

in which we move, for the benefit of others, as well as of ourselves.

All men are not placed in the same stations, and consequently are not endowed with the same gifts by divine Providence, but such as are suited to the stations they fill : and it is comparatively of little importance to themselves, what part is assigned them if they act it well ; and this indeed is of unspeakable moment !

Let us all then, my friends, resolve, by divine assistance, to improve the talents which God has given us, and exert them in the spheres allotted us, with vigor, constancy and cheerfulness, while we have opportunity — *working* (according to our Lord's declaration*) *the work of him who sent us, while it is called to day*, remembering, *that the night cometh when no man can work* ; and *that we must render an account of our stewardship*. — By a resolute opposition to error and superstition — by a steady adherence to religious truth, and

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* John ix. 4. Luke xvi. 2.

a regular discharge of every divine, social and personal duty, let us prove ourselves to be the genuine followers of our Lord, and all his faithful servants, who by a patient continuance in well doing, have fought for divine and immortal glory — then will God confer upon us eternal life,*—then shall we have a place assigned us with the truly great! — Then shall we be admitted into the society of wise and good beings, of perfected spirits, of holy angels, of the exalted Saviour, and even into the presence of God, the indefectible spring of perfection and blessedness: *when we shall shine, as the brightness of the firmament, if not as the stars of heaven for ever and ever! †*

* Rom ii. 7. † Dan. xii. 3.



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